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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT'S PARTY IN GOOD POSITION AHEAD OF  
ELECTIONS

REF: JAKARTA 00355 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Based on public opinion surveys and what we are hearing, President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD) is performing very strongly as Indonesia heads towards its April 9 national legislative elections. There remains a real question whether the party has the grassroots network needed to get voters to the polls, however. Well-established secular-leaning parties (Golkar, PDI-P) trail, but remain strong contenders. Islamic parties are far behind. The battle at this point is for the large pool of undecided voters. Big rallies and marches start March 16, the beginning of the all-out campaign season. END SUMMARY.

#### PRESIDENT'S PARTY IN LEAD

12. (C) President Yudhoyono's party seems to be in very good shape ahead of the April 9 parliamentary elections. A group of highly reputable, independent institutes released a survey on March 11 which indicated that PD, with 21.5 percent support, is leading Golkar and the Indonesian Party of Democratic Struggle (PDI-P). Respondents were highly satisfied with both PD and President Yudhoyono's performance in government. Considering that PD garnered only 7 percent of the national vote in the 2004 legislative elections, most observers believe that obtaining even 15 percent of the national vote on Election Day for PD would be a remarkable success for a party only formed earlier this decade. And, if PD wins over 20% of the seats, President Yudhoyono would be in the driver's seat ahead of the July presidential elections (in order to be nominated for the presidency, a candidate must get at least 25% of the vote in the Legislative election at least 20% of seats in Parliament.

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT PD'S ORGANIZATION

13. (C) That said, questions remain about the capabilities of the PD organization. In a number of recent trips, observers have told Pol/C that PD is strong due to its effective television ads and its link with President Yudhoyono, who is very popular, but that its grassroots outreach campaign is still not up to snuff.

14. (C) During March 11 meetings in Serang, Banten (a city near Jakarta), for example, Pol/C was told that the local PD organization--headed by a former general who was in Yudhoyono's military academy graduating class--was growing in capabilities and outreach. At the same time, however, the PD organization in Banten Province still did not have as many campaign workers and volunteers on the ground as some of the other major parties. Given that elections in Indonesia often involve a dose of "money politics" and the development of close links between candidates and voters, a mediocre ground game could be problematic for PD on Election Day.

ESTABLISHED PARTIES SEEM TO BE IN SOLID POSITION

15. (C) PD's two major contenders trail, but are still in the hunt. Former president Megawati Sukarnoputri's party, the populist PDI-P, is runner up in the latest survey at 15.5 percent. With well-developed grassroots outreach and historical resonance (Megawati is the daughter of Indonesia's first president), it is likely to perform relatively well on April 9.

16. (C) Vice President Kalla's Golkar party, the largest party in the Parliament (DPR)--with 23 percent of the seats--is currently at 14.27 percent. Despite Golkar's seeming decline in popularity, this is still a respectable showing and some observers think the party will do better on Election Day due to its strong organization. Recent speculation that VP Kalla might run as president (see reftel) may be aimed at reviving voter interest in the party.

#### ISLAMIC-ORIENTED PARTIES FAR BEHIND

17. (C) Islamic parties are distant contenders at this point. The United Development Party (PPP) is the third largest party in Parliament, but received just 4.15 percent of support in the recent poll (it received 8.15 percent support in the 2004 election). According to a PPP source, it lacks the funds for a robust media campaign. Observers also expected PKS, an Islamic-oriented party strongly rooted in various parts of the country, to do quite well in this election. However, PKS is also polling poorly at just over 4 percent.

#### ALL OUT CAMPAIGN SET TO BEGIN MARCH 16

18. (C) Campaign activities have been in swing for months (Indonesian cities and towns are already festooned with campaign posters). Per regulation, however, the official campaign season featuring rallies, marches and banners, opens on March 16. The last several weeks of the campaign will be hectic as parties battle for votes. Almost a quarter of Indonesian voters remain undecided, for example, and parties will focus on those voters. Based on the polls and what we are hearing, PD seems to be in a very strong position for now. Nonetheless, it will have to overcome a nascent grassroots structure in order to translate its lead in the surveys to a victory at the polls.

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